



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Biblical Purposes for Trials

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The Late C. S. Lewis was no stranger to pain. He coined the phrase “pain the megaphone of God.” Consider his following quote:

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but Shouts in our Pain...It is His Megaphone to rouse a deaf world.¹

Given the fallenness of humanity, trials like pain, are both a normal and necessary part of life. It has been said that all people are either currently in experiencing one or more trials, just coming out of them, or are about ready to begin experience them. Both trials and pain tell us that things are not perfect, and that something needs to change. Philip Yancey referring to pain in “Where is God When It Hurts,” has a chapter about pain entitled, “The Gift that Nobody Wants.” A God-given trial can be viewed as from God and as such is intended be for our benefit, if we respond rightly. However, if we choose to respond sinfully though we might still learn and gain from the experience, it usually comes at an undesirable and avoidable cost.

In this chapter Lewis explained that Dr. Brand was noted for His work in India in the area of Leprosy. He established that “in virtually all cases leprosy only numbs the extremities. Tissue damage results solely because the warning system of pain has fallen silent.”

It was in India where Dr. Brand discovered that leprosy itself was not directly eroding the extremities—it only did so secondarily while functioning as an anesthetic (*if you are easily squeamish, please skip this paragraph*). Due to not experiencing pain, lepers often did damage to themselves. For example lepers in India may have walked barefoot over glass, picked-up a piece of burning wood, or cut their hands to the bone on something sharp. It was even discovered that in some cases rats were to blame. When lepers slept they could not feel rats gnawing at their body parts.

Dreadful, to be sure, but the point Lewis made is that in spite of pains discomfort, when looked at from the lepers point of view, we ought to give thanks to God that we are able to experience pain! Ever thank God for pain before? It is amazing how easy it is to take pain for granted, and treat it only as a bad thing.

In the same way trials can be viewed as a “good.” Without condoning any evil behavior that may have accompanied a particular trial, we can

conclude that in spite of the pain experienced, God can use trials to reach an unbeliever. Time does not allow for the many stories that could be given about great sinners becoming mightily used by God. John Newton’s biography serves as one notable example

In James chapter 1, the focus on trials emphasizes the purposes of God’s continuing work of maturation in the believer’s faith, which is evident throughout their life. In such cases, God is glorified during trials, because trials reveal God as supreme in the believer’s life evidenced by their joyful continence even when life would normally have frustrated, and hurt them in numerous ways to varying degrees, and trials in James also reveals the believer’s faith as authentic, genuine and true.

We will dive more into the text of James in another study, making the text of James clearer. The attitude I aspire to have as I study these texts, and hope that you might have is that we would be able to say along with other believers is “as much as trials are painful, and though I may truly suffer during them, the truth is I God promises to do something good during them, and God will help me endure them, Lord help me to be faithful and to glorify you until they pass, so that I may receive all of the blessings that you have intended.

James 1:12¹² Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

The type of faith that that James calls for and God looks for is one that responds faithfully to God. Hearers of the Word who are disobedient are not the blessed ones in James. Even adhering to orthodox doctrine is not enough—it is the doers of the Word that are blessed.

James 1:22-25²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Romans 10:9-10⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with

BIBLE STUDIES

WED. @ 7:00 - 7:30 A.M., ROOM 19 IN THE STATE CAPITOL
(TAKE EITHER ELEVATOR TO THE LOWER LOBBY, EXIT LEFT)

Biblical Purposes for Trials

the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

The one who confesses Christ as Lord, is growing in the maturity of their faith and obedience to God. While they are not perfect, they are genuinely changed by God and have genuinely decided to turn from sin and serve the Lord as a way of life. That is how God describes those who are genuinely saved through faith. Rather than living a self-willed sin-justifying lifestyle, true believers are described as those who have thoughtfully chosen to trust in God, which results in a practical demonstration of a life lived like Christ, who came as a humble and obedient servant, desirous and ready to do His Father's will.

THE EIGHT PURPOSES OF TRIALS

Today we will examine eight purposes to trials. If you want to make sure that you are glorifying God during trials, or if you are struggling to keep your mind stayed on truth, while undergoing trials, then keep these eight purposes for trials in ready reach, so that the next time trials attempt to overtake you, you can be ready to think biblically.

1. TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH

In many ways the Lord assists us in taking spiritual inventory by bringing trials into our lives to demonstrate to us the strength or weakness of our faith. A person who becomes resentful, bitter, and self-pitying when troubles come plainly exposes either weak faith, or at least a faith in need of strengthening. On the other hand, a person who turns more and more to the Lord as troubles get worse, and asks for God's help, and humbly asks other believers for help when they are struggling, just as plainly demonstrates a strong faith.

2. TO HUMBLE US, TO REMIND US NOT TO LET OUR TRUST IN THE LORD TURN INTO PRESUMPTION AND SPIRITUAL SELF-SATISFACTION

The greater our blessings, the more Satan will tempt us to look on them as our own accomplishments rather than the Lord's, or as our rightful due, and to become proud rather than humble. Paul testifies that, "because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!" (2 Cor. 12:7).

3. TO WEAN US FROM OUR DEPENDENCE ON WORLDLY THINGS

The more we accumulate material possessions and worldly knowledge, experience, and recognition, the more we are tempted to rely on them instead of the Lord. These things can include education, work success, important people we know, honors we may have been given, and many other types of worldly benefits that often are not wrong in themselves, but can easily become the focus of our concern and the basis of our trust.

4. TO CALL US TO ETERNAL AND HEAVENLY HOPE.

The harder our trials become and the longer they last, the more we look forward to being with the Lord.

5. TO REVEAL WHAT WE REALLY LOVE.

Sixth, trials are given to teach us to value God's blessings. Our reason tells us to value the world and the things of the world, and our senses tell us to value pleasure and ease. But through trials, faith tells us to value the spiritual things of God with which He has blessed us abundantly—including His Word, His care, His provision, His strength, and, of course, His salvation.

The psalmist exulted:

Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth offers praises with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, for You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy (Ps. 63:3–7).

7. THE LORD USES TRIALS TO DEVELOP IN HIS SAINTS ENDURING STRENGTH FOR GREATER USEFULNESS

The Puritan Thomas Manton perceptively observed that "while all things are quiet and comfortable, we live by sense rather than faith. But the worth of a soldier is never known in times of peace." The Apostle Paul confessed, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). The writer of Hebrews speaks of the godly men and women "who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of

Biblical Purposes for Trials

lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong” (Heb. 11:33–34; cf. Isa. 41:10).

8. THE LORD USES TRIALS TO EQUIP US FOR HELPING OTHERS IN THEIR TRIALS.

Jesus told Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31–32). Peter’s sufferings were given not only to strengthen him for greater usefulness but also to prepare him to strengthen others. That is true of every believer’s sufferings and testing, and was true of our Lord in His humanity. “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18; cf. 4:15).

Paul sums up this principle in his words to the Corinthians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. (2 Cor. 1:3–6)

Since trials are so productive, it is essential for us to respond rightly to them. James helps us greatly in chapter 1: 2–12 by giving five key means for persevering through trials: a joyful attitude (v. 2), an understanding mind (v. 3), a submissive will (v. 4), a believing heart (vv. 5–8), and a humble spirit (vv. 9–11). He then tells us of the reward for perseverance (v. 12).

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, The MacMillan Company, 1962), 93.